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# The Impact of Detectives' Manner of Questioning on Rape Victims' Disclosure

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## Abstract

Research has documented that few reported rapes are prosecuted by the legal system. The purpose of this study is to explain how the interactions between victims and detectives can strengthen or weaken the investigation itself. Twenty rape victims were interviewed to examine how law enforcement detectives' manner of questioning affects rape victims' level of disclosure. Using qualitative methodology, the results show that the detectives' manner of questioning can play a role in victims' disclosure. Detectives using a gentle manner of questioning with victims can help produce stronger victim statements and thus build stronger cases for prosecution.

## Keywords

criminal justice, law enforcement, rape victims

Studies estimate that only 8% to 29% of all rape crimes are reported to the police (Bachman, 1998; Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992). When victims/survivors<sup>1</sup> do report, their first criminal justice system (CJS) contact will usually be an initial report to a responding officer. Then, the case is passed on to a detective to investigate the crime and interview the victim and suspect. Studies suggest that some rape victims are treated by law enforcement in ways that they experience as upsetting, whereas others are not (Campbell, Wasco, Ahrens, Sefl, & Barnes, 2001). It is important to understand this differential treatment because negative experiences with law enforcement can influence *the quality of the investigation itself*.

Studies suggest that 82% to 86% of all reported rape cases were dropped by the CJS (termed *case attrition*), with *most* rape cases being dropped during the investigational stage

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(Crandall & Helitzer, 2003; Frazier & Haney, 1996; Spohn, Beichner, & Davis-Frenzel, 2001). Given that few reported rape cases move beyond this stage, more research is needed about how the interactions between the victim and the detective may affect the quality of the investigation. The existing literature on the factors that predict rape case attrition may provide insight into which groups of victims have positive or negative interactions with detectives.

Prosecuted and nonprosecuted cases tend to have distinctly different profiles regarding victim and assault characteristics. CJS personnel often prosecute cases in which they believe the victim will make a credible witness. Therefore, a case might not be prosecuted if officials do not think that the victim will make a credible witness even if they believe that a rape occurred. The perception of victim credibility may be influenced by victim characteristics. For example, research suggests that younger victims are more likely to have their cases dropped by CJS personnel because they are often viewed as less credible (Spears & Spohn, 1996, 1997). In addition, cases are more likely to be prosecuted if the victim is White and less often when the victim belongs to a racial minority group (Campbell et al., 2001). Furthermore, many studies suggest that the victim and offender racial composition influence case processing (cf. Spears & Spohn, 1997; Spohn et al., 2001). In particular, this research has found that cases involving African American offenders raping White victims were more likely to be prosecuted.

Previous studies also suggest that lack of victim engagement with the investigational process significantly influences cases being dropped (Kerstetter & Van Winkle, 1990). A delay in reporting by victims is related to cases not being prosecuted (Frohmann, 1997). Victims who wait even a day to report their rape may be viewed as less credible. In addition, prosecutors tend to view victims as lacking credibility and thus drop cases if gaps or inconsistencies exist in the victims' accounts of the rape. Furthermore, prosecutors assumed that the victims' inconsistencies could not be attributed to law enforcement error.

Research has shown that assault characteristics also influence prosecution. For example, victims are often viewed as credible and thus have their cases prosecuted when offenders use weapons or victims endure injuries (Campbell et al., 2001; Spohn et al., 2001). Although the law no longer requires proof of resistance, many judges and jurors still view injury as necessary proof the victim did not consent (Giardino, Datner, & Asher, 2003). In addition, alcohol or drug use by the victim diminishes their credibility in the eyes of many CJS personnel, which prior studies have shown is related to dropping cases (Campbell, 1998).

In addition to victim credibility, prior literature suggests that detectives are more likely to forward cases when the offender is already in custody because it requires less investigational effort. For example, detectives would not need to complete paperwork for an arrest warrant, obtain an arrest warrant from a judge, or search for the offender. Detectives routinely encourage victims to prosecute if the offender is in custody (Kerstetter & Van Winkle, 1990).

Overall, the extant literature suggests that few reported rape cases are prosecuted with the CJS only forwarding those cases perceived as credible or "winnable" with victim and assault characteristics used as indices of credibility. Prior research has consistently found that most cases are dropped during the investigation, which highlights the need for an

in-depth examination of the detective's role in case attrition. However, relatively little is known about rape victims' experiences with detectives during the investigation. The limited research on this topic suggests that almost half of all victims report negative experiences with law enforcement, including being told their stories are unbelievable or not serious enough to pursue, and being questioned in a blaming manner (Campbell & Raja, 2005; Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Monroe et al., 2005). It remains unknown why some victims have negative experiences whereas others do not. Taken together, it may be possible that detectives question victims differently in cases viewed as credible and subsequently prosecuted than cases viewed as lacking credibility and subsequently dropped. Therefore, the primary purpose of the current study was to examine victims' perceptions of the investigational interview, comparing how these perceptions vary in cases that were ultimately prosecuted by the CJS compared with those that were not prosecuted.

Successful prosecution of cases depends heavily on the information provided by victims during the investigation because rape typically has no witnesses (Martin, 2005). Thus, cases are more likely to be prosecuted when a thorough account of the rape has been documented. As such, the communication between the victim and detective is paramount to the development of the case, and perhaps ultimately its prosecutorial outcome. However, the complexity of this flow of communication has not been examined. There may be variability in how detectives ask questions, which may affect victims positively or negatively and subsequently impact the information given by the victims. It is important to examine this issue from the victims' viewpoint because their perception of the detectives' questioning may affect how they feel about these interactions and their level of disclosure in subsequent interactions. By looking back at the victims' perceptions, we can begin to understand how the dynamic interplay between victims and detectives may affect the quality of the case that is put together.

This study built a theory that explains how the interactions between the victim and detective affect the quality of the investigation itself. The current study had three foci to examine how the quality of the interactions between victims and detectives are substantially different in cases that are prosecuted compared with those that are not. First, the literature suggests that victim and assault characteristics and early arrest affect whether or not cases will be prosecuted. Drawing on this literature, the current study examined the case antecedents (e.g., victim characteristics) that may affect the CJS personnel's decisions to prosecute or drop the case, as well as the detectives' manner of questioning during the investigation.

Second, the current study examined if the victims' perceptions of the detectives' manner of questioning is different in cases that were ultimately prosecuted by the CJS compared with those that were not prosecuted. For example, a detective's manner of questioning may include building rapport with victims or using an intimidating approach as shown in prior studies.

Third, this study explored how the perceived manner of questioning by detectives influenced the victims' level of disclosure with the investigation and whether that differed among the cases that were ultimately prosecuted compared with those that were not prosecuted. To answer these questions, qualitative interviews with 20 adult rape victims were analyzed to understand their experiences with detectives within one Midwest county.

## **Method**

### ***Community Setting***

The setting for this study was a geographically diverse county in the Midwest with a population of 829,453 that included urban, suburban, and rural areas. The focal county has 19 police departments, which vary in the structure of their detective bureaus. For example, some departments have one designated detective to handle reported rape cases whereas other departments do not have designated personnel for sexual violence crimes (i.e., all detectives are responsible for responding to a full variety of crimes). In addition, some departments have semispecialized units that focus on interpersonal crimes such as domestic violence and sexual violence crimes or crimes against people in general (i.e., all non-property crimes). The participants' cases were handled by multiple police departments in the focal county, but no differences emerged among the various departments.

The first point of contact by the victim for the majority of cases began with a dispatched road patrol officer who took a report and referred the victim to the sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) program (who provides all medical forensic exams for rape victims in the county). While at the SANE program, the victims received crisis intervention and support by advocates from the local rape crisis center. Detectives became involved with the cases after the exams for the majority of situations. Most of the detectives who handled the participants' cases were male, which is consistent with the demographic make-up of law enforcement in the focal county. No differences were found between male and female detectives' treatment of victims.

### ***Participants***

Adult female rape victims who reported their assaults to law enforcement and received a medical forensic exam from 1999 to 2007 were the target sample for this study. Rape victims who sought exams following the rape were selected for this study because their postassault actions are relatively similar. That is, victims in this sample were already engaged in the investigational process (i.e., exam) prior to the detectives' involvement. This provides an opportunity to examine how the interactions between detectives and engaged victims affect victims' subsequent levels of disclosure during the investigational process.

The focal SANE program distributed a form to patients regarding the study. Victims were contacted approximately 10 weeks after completing the contact form, which is typically enough time for them to have experiences with the CJS and a decision made about their case. If the victims agreed to participate, the status of their court case was assessed and an interview was scheduled after the case was either dropped or officially charged.

It was anticipated that there would not be enough cases recruited directly from the SANE program because victims may not be ready to talk about their assault. As such, an additional sampling strategy was needed to identify enough cases for the study. A second approach recruited "older" cases that had gone through the same focal SANE program. A flyer advertising the study throughout our focal county was distributed through posting advertisements

at local businesses and human and health service agencies, and community-wide mailings (see Campbell, Sefl, Wasco, & Ahrens, 2004). If victims decided to contact the research team, they were screened for eligibility and then scheduled for an interview. This additional recruitment strategy was necessary for reaching the desired sample size. Overall, 50% of the participants were recruited at the SANE program, and the other 50% from community-wide advertisements and mailings. There were no substantive differences in the findings of victims recruited at the SANE program compared with those recruited through community-wide advertisements and mailings.

The sample includes 20 female victims who reported their rape in the focal county and were examined at the focal SANE program. Participant recruitment and interviewing continued until the sample size allowed for saturation, whereby the same themes were repeated, with no new themes emerging among participants (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). This is a reasonable sample size for a qualitative study examining phenomenon in-depth (Creswell, 2007). Nine victims had their cases prosecuted for rape charges with five resulting in a guilty verdict or plea bargain, three pending trial, and one acquitted by a jury. Eleven victims' cases were not prosecuted for rape charges. Two intimate partner rapes resulted in domestic violence misdemeanor charges but not rape felony charges. One victim dropped the case fearing the system could not protect her. Two victims were raped by strangers who were not apprehended.

## *Procedures*

Interviews were conducted in-person by one of three trained interviewers. Interviewing is distinct in grounded theory, whereby data collection and analysis occur simultaneously (Creswell, 2007). Throughout the data-collection process, the interviewers met regularly to review transcripts, discuss emerging themes, and identify topics that needed more exploration in subsequent interviews. The length of the interviews ranged from 1.5 to 4 hr, with an average of 2 hr. The interviews were tape-recorded with permission and transcribed. Participants were paid US\$30 for their time. The procedures used in this study were approved by the Wayne State University's institutional review board.

## *Measures*

The semistructured interview protocol was developed in four stages. First, the interview was adapted in part from a prior study codeveloped with advocates and rape victims (Campbell et al., 2001). This work helped identify question phrasing that was understandable and supportive to rape victims. Second, the literature on law enforcement interactions with victims informed the protocol. Third, legal and medical personnel were consulted on the interview protocol and revised accordingly. Fourth, the protocol was pilot tested with five rape victims to assess the content and probes (not included in the sample). The interview consisted of four areas: (a) the rape itself; (b) victims' experiences with SANE program staff; (c) victims' decisions to participate in prosecution; and (d) victims' experiences with law enforcement and prosecutors.

## Data Analyses

The data were reduced to a manageable form by identifying transcript segments that pertained to case antecedents (e.g., case characteristics) and the victim and detective interactions (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and placed in a separate file using NVivo 7 software (QSR International, 2006). The next step in the analyses involved three coding phases. First, the principal investigator (PI) defined an action describing what people were doing or what was happening for every line of the interview, which allowed the analyst to detect processes that may be occurring during the investigational interviews and the consequences of those processes (Charmaz, 2006). In addition, the PI documented memos of thoughts about relationships among the data.

Second, the analyst identified codes that made the most analytic sense of the data (termed "*focused*" coding; Charmaz, 2006). After identifying the focused codes, the PI returned to the coded data and applied the focused codes to each piece of data. Furthermore, the PI engaged in more in-depth memo writing to identify the relationships between codes within and across the prosecuted and nonprosecuted groups (Charmaz, 2006).

The third level of coding is axial coding, which involves relating categories to subcategories to examine contingencies in the theory (Charmaz, 2006). The preliminary analyses showed that the victim–offender relationship (e.g., intimate partners, acquaintances, and strangers) may differentially affect detectives' manner of questioning within the prosecuted and nonprosecuted groups. Thus, the PI examined if these patterns were systematically related to victim–offender relationships, case outcomes, or both.

## Enhancing Analytical Rigor

In qualitative research, rigor is evaluated by whether the investigator has undertaken procedures to check the trustworthiness and credibility of the conclusions drawn (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus, the transcriptions were corrected for errors. The PI also met regularly with another interviewer to discuss emerging themes, receive feedback about the theoretical notions, and identify gaps in the conceptual model. In addition, an audit trail was developed to document procedural steps and analysis operations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Furthermore, the PI systematically searched for divergent patterns to provide insight into the instances that do not fit within the overall pattern of the data (Patton, 2002). Member checks were also conducted with three victims who were not part of the original sample. These victims were asked first to describe their experiences with the detectives, and then their feedback was requested about the theory. The average age of victim informants was 31 years, with a range of 18 to 45 years. Two informants were White and one was African American. The informants relayed experiences with their detectives that paralleled the theory and did not suggest changes to the theory.

Another way to enhance credibility is to have the intended users of the theory provide feedback (Patton, 2002). Victim advocates acquire a great deal of information about how the CJS responds to victims making them suitable to provide feedback about the theory (Campbell, 1998). The informants included five who had experience working with rape

**Table 1.** Demographics of Victims (Percentage or Mean)

Demographics of victims	All cases (N = 20)	Prosecuted cases (N = 9)	Nonprosecuted cases (N = 11)
Age in years (M)	28.05 (10.74)	31.78 (12.75)	25.00 (8.16)
Race/ethnicity			
White	85% (N = 17)	100% (N = 9)	73% (N = 8)
Minority	15% (N = 3)	0% (N = 0)	27% (N = 3)

Note: Standard deviation in parentheses.

victims in the context of advocacy. All of the advocates were White with an average age of 36 years (range of 28 to 51 years). The average years of experience providing advocacy was 7 years, with a range of 3 to 10 years. The advocates were asked to describe a recent client's experiences with a detective and then were asked to provide feedback about the theory.

## Results

### *Case Antecedents That Differentiate Prosecuted and Nonprosecuted Cases*

The first research question examined case antecedents that differentiate prosecuted and nonprosecuted cases before detective involvement. This section will begin with a description of the sample characteristics followed by a discussion of the differences between the prosecuted and nonprosecuted cases. Overall, 9 victims had their cases prosecuted and 11 victims' cases were not prosecuted for rape charges. As shown in Table 1, the average age of victim participants was 28 years, with a range of 18 to 53 years. Prosecuted cases had older victims on average than nonprosecuted cases (average age of 32 years vs. 25 years). Eighty-five percent of the victim participants were White, which is similar to the demographic makeup of the focal county. As shown in Table 2, 60% of the offenders were White and 40% of the offenders were from racial minority groups. Prosecuted cases had a higher percentage of offenders from racial minority groups than nonprosecuted cases (56% vs. 27%) and a lower percentage of White offenders (45% vs. 73%). In examining the victim/offender racial dyad, 55% of White victims were raped by White offenders while 30% were raped by offenders from racial minority groups. In addition, 10% of victims from racial minority groups were raped by offenders from racial minority groups whereas 5% were raped by a White offender. Prosecuted cases had a higher percentage of White victims and minority offenders than nonprosecuted cases (56% vs. 9%). However, none of the cases involving minority victims was prosecuted regardless of the offender's race.

As displayed in Table 3, only two cases involved the offender using weapons, and neither case was prosecuted because the offenders were strangers who were not caught. The majority of victims were raped by someone they knew, with 40% being raped by their



**Table 2.** Demographics of Offender Characteristics (Percentages)

Offender characteristics	All cases (N = 20)	Prosecuted cases (N = 9)	Nonprosecuted cases (N = 11)
Race/ethnicity			
White	60% (N = 12)	44.5% (N = 4)	73% (N = 8)
Minority	40% (N = 8)	55.5% (N = 5)	27% (N = 3)
Victim/offender racial dyad			
White victim/offender	55% (N = 11)	44.5% (N = 4)	64% (N = 7)
Minority victim/offender	10% (N = 2)	0% (N = 0)	18% (N = 2)
White victim/minority offender	30% (N = 6)	55.5% (N = 5)	9% (N = 1)
Minority victim/White offender	5% (N = 1)	0% (N = 0)	9% (N = 1)

partners (e.g., dating partner, spouse), and 40% being raped by acquaintances (e.g., friend, coworker). Similar to more recent studies, the victim–offender relationship appears to be no different for prosecuted and nonprosecuted cases. Research has also shown that the CJS perceives injuries as another indicator of credibility. Overall, 60% of the participants experienced physical (non-anogenital) injury and 40% endured anogenital injury. Prosecuted cases had a slightly higher percentage of women with physical injury (67% vs. 55%) and anogenital injury (45% vs. 37%) than nonprosecuted cases. Another indicator of credibility is victims reporting immediately. Fifty percent of the participants had reported within 2 hr following the assault. Prosecuted cases had a higher percentage of participants who reported within 2 hr following the rape compared with nonprosecuted cases (67% vs. 36%). Studies suggest that the CJS regard victims who consume alcohol prior to their rape as less credible. Forty percent of the participants consumed alcohol or drugs prior to the assault. However, more participants with prosecuted cases used alcohol than those with nonprosecuted cases (56% vs. 28%). A closer examination of the prosecuted cases showed that most women consumed alcohol 3 to 7 hr *prior to* their rape. Thus, it is possible that alcohol use had less weight as an indicator of credibility or other indices held more weight in the CJS decisions.

In addition to victim credibility, the literature suggests that detectives are apt to forward cases when the offender is already in custody because it requires less effort (e.g., search for the offender). In this study, 55% of the offenders were arrested on the same day as the report. Prosecuted cases had a higher percentage of arrests that occurred on the same day as the victims' initial report compared with nonprosecuted cases (89% vs. 27%).

In examining the descriptive data, it appears that there are different profiles regarding the victim and case characteristics between the prosecuted and nonprosecuted cases. Prior literature suggests that the CJS only prosecutes those cases that they consider credible, with victim and case characteristics used as indices of credibility. According to the literature, the CJS deems credible victims as middle-aged White women who reported immediately and endured injuries. In addition, cases viewed as credible by the CJS often involve offenders who belong to a racial minority group and used a weapon. Similar to prior studies, the findings suggest

**Table 3.** Demographics of Case Characteristics (Percentages)

Demographics of case characteristics	All cases (N = 20)	Prosecuted cases (N = 9)	Nonprosecuted cases (N = 11)
Victim/offender relationship			
Stranger	20% (N = 4)	22% (N = 2)	18% (N = 2)
Intimate/familial	40% (N = 8)	44.5% (N = 4)	36.5% (N = 4)
Acquaintance	40% (N = 8)	33.5% (N = 3)	45.5% (N = 5)
Victim consumed drugs or alcohol	40% (N = 8)	55.5% (N = 5)	27.5% (N = 3)
Victim endured injuries			
Physical injury	60% (N = 12)	67% (N = 6)	54.5% (N = 6)
Anogenital injury	40% (N = 8)	44.5% (N = 4)	36.5% (N = 4)
Used weapon	10% (N = 2)	0% (N = 0)	18% (N = 2)
Drugged victim	10% (N = 2)	0% (N = 0)	18% (N = 2)
Victim reported rape within 2 hr	50% (N = 10)	67% (N = 6)	36.5% (N = 4)
Offender arrested on same day	55% (N = 11)	89% (N = 8)	27% (N = 3)

that the CJS may be basing their decisions in part on victim credibility and required effort in addition to evidence. Prior to interviewing the victim, detectives typically receive information about the victim and offender, the assault context, and the length of time between the rape and the report. Thus, detectives may have notions of the victims' credibility prior to the interview. In this study, it appears that factors of credibility and effort were influential in the nature of the questioning, which will be presented next.

### *Victims Perceptions of Questioning*

The second research question examined how victims perceive their interactions with the detectives and found two overarching themes: (a) manner of questioning and (b) communication of belief or disbelief.

*Manner of questioning.* Women with prosecuted cases described the detectives' pacing of questions substantially differently than women with nonprosecuted cases. In prosecuted cases, many women reported that their detectives did not begin the interview by asking questions but instead consoled and built rapport with them prior to asking questions. Rape often leaves victims feeling vulnerable (Bletzer & Koss, 2006) and thus, detectives building rapport prior to the interview may help victims feel safe with the detectives, as illustrated in the following example. In this case, a 23-year-old White female was raped by a Vietnamese male massage therapist; she called 911 on exiting the salon. Two detectives responded immediately and arrested the offender. The case is being prosecuted. In the following exchange, the participant describes how the two detectives approached her immediately following the rape:

4129: They were consoling, careful, you know. They didn't bombard me, a man had just assaulted me. I felt calmness right away. . . . I felt safe . . . they were, you know, they come out and they were consoling. They weren't question, question. They made sure that I was OK and safe, felt safe there.

I: So not being bombarded with questions, made you feel more safe with them?

4129: Yeah . . . they didn't come at me right away wanting to know this, this and this. They gave me my time and my space.

I: Why is that important to do?

4129: Because one, you've just been sexually assaulted by a man. The last thing she needs is a man on a power trip. Someone coming at her, demanding things from her when one they didn't even ask, they just took. And you're not in a normal state of mind when you're going through, after something like that happens. You need somebody, you need people to be careful with you and be careful of the way they talk to you and treat you and approach you, because the way I look at it now, I don't know this man. I don't trust anyone.

As this case illustrates, it was important for the detectives, whom she just met, to help her feel safe because she had just been raped by a man whom she had just met. In addition, when the participant describes what she does not need from the detectives ("someone coming at her, demanding things from her"), she actually is describing her offender. The victim needs the detectives to be *different from* the offender to feel safe with them. Building rapport prior to the interview is one mechanism by which the detectives helped victims feel comfortable.

Women with prosecuted cases also reported that the detectives asked questions at a pace that felt comfortable, told them to take their time, and in some instances paused the questioning when the victims became emotionally distressed. Many participants also described their detectives' style of questioning as gentle by encouraging them to "tell more," instead of "demanding" answers, as highlighted in the continuation of the interview excerpted above:

4129: Just their approach, their demeanors, the way they spoke to you. They weren't forceful, they weren't bossy, they were careful. The way that they approached me, the way they talked to me. They treated me. It wasn't like . . . any other case they would have been bam, bam, bam, questions, we just want answers. We want this, this, and this.

The detectives, then, had a gentle approach; they were careful in their questioning and undemanding. Similarly, many women expressed feeling safe and protected by the detectives.

By contrast, participants with nonprosecuted cases described the detectives' pace of questioning as rapid and forceful. Unlike the prosecuted cases, detectives in nonprosecuted cases began with questions rather than building rapport, which made them feel unsafe or uncomfortable. In the next example, a 41-year-old White female was raped by her estranged

White husband. She suspects her husband drugged her because she blacked out after having two drinks and then woke up 3 hr later naked from the waist down in her husband's truck. After vomiting intermittently for several hours, the woman sought medical care. The offender stated it was consensual and showed the police pictures of the victim's genitalia. The woman noted that the detective requested that she sign a legal waiver stating that she no longer wished the case to be prosecuted, even though the participant had consistently expressed her interest in prosecution. The offender was never arrested or charged. In this example, the woman expressed feeling unsafe with the detective, who never built rapport with her:

4125: When he let me in, we walked straight through the back and I looked around at all these desks and there was no one there. Then we took a right into the detective area and there was no one in there. Then we walked through another section of offices into a closed door room that was smaller, about half the size of this room. It was like a 6 × 6 foot room. And he was literally that far away from me. I didn't understand why a detective that was a brand-new detective would want to speak to a rape victim when there is no one else in the police station. I felt completely on guard. And then I'm gonna sit in a closed-door room with this person and explain to him all about my rape after I know damn good and well he has got copies of all the pictures [of her genitalia].

In this case, the victim is being interviewed while feeling vulnerable, uncomfortable, and guarded with the detective. Similarly, other participants expressed feeling uncomfortable and guarded with the detectives from the beginning of the interviews. They reported that the questions in the beginning of their interviews were less focused on the factual information regarding the assault (i.e., what happened) and more focused on their character and reaction to the rape, which made them feel uncomfortable. Therefore, many participants with non-prosecuted cases began the interview feeling guarded instead of safe.

Participants with nonprosecuted cases expressed feeling rushed and described the interview as being "drilled" with a long succession of questions, which felt forceful. In the next example, a 21-year-old White female was raped by her White ex-boyfriend a few days after the relationship ended. After calling 911, the offender was arrested immediately by the responding officers and prior to the arrival of the two detectives assigned to the case. The offender was charged with a domestic violence misdemeanor, not a felony rape. The participant describes the two detectives' manner of questioning:

4127: But when the detectives came in they were cold toward me and just started automatically saying why, why didn't you do these things, it made it harder for me to talk about. . . . They [detectives] were alternating kind of like, Well why didn't you hit him? Why didn't you yell? You know, why didn't, why didn't you hit him? Why didn't you try to get away from him? I don't know how to get away from him for one. He's a guy; he's bigger than me and he's stronger than me and he's my kid's father. . . . And they're asking me like why didn't you hit him? Why

would I hit him? Why would I yell? Why would I scream? His grandfather's in the other room and he's deaf, he can't hear. My child's in the other room, on the other side of us. Why would I wake her up and have her walk into that? I was uncomfortable with the detectives. I felt like they were kind of grilling me . . . like when the detectives were pushing me, they were kind of like shoving the questions on me, one after another after another. . . . They weren't giving me, like, the option of slowing it down.

In this situation, the detectives did not build rapport but instead began the interview by questioning her response to the rape, which made her uncomfortable. The woman describes their questioning as rapid and forceful from the start of the interview, again reminding the woman of her very recent victimization. As a result of detectives' forceful manner of questioning and absence of rapport building, some women expressed feeling uneasy and guarded with the detectives, which made it difficult to talk about their rapes.

*Communicating opinions of believability.* Participants with prosecuted cases described the *content* of the communication with detectives considerably differently than participants with nonprosecuted cases, specifically around communication of belief or disbelief of victims' stories. In prosecuted cases, the participants expressed feeling believed because of statements made by the detectives or by their behavior. For example, many women reported that the detectives verbalized being on the "victim's side" or shared information about the offenders (e.g., prior convictions), which indicated to the participants that the detectives believed them.

Detectives' effort in the investigation was another indicator to participants of belief. Some women noted that the detectives were investing a great effort in their cases, which was an indication that detectives believed the victims. In the example that follows, a 45-year-old White female was raped by her White male neighbor and made a police report the next morning. The offender was arrested the same day as the report and was found guilty by a jury trial. In this exchange, the participant explains why she felt believed, even though the detectives never verbalized belief:

4111: The detectives, they believed me; they never said, I believe you. But just their work ethic and how they handled themselves and how they talked to me and treated me is you can tell. . . . They just intently listened to me and did what they do, being detectives and trying to find a bad person, the computers and driving here and staking out over here waiting for him. . . . I'm going to say they believed me. I'm just assuming they believed me because they were there helping me and doing their job and trying to catch this guy. But they just made me feel so good and that I was doing the right thing, and I mean to me there was no doubt that they ever thought for a minute that I was lying, never for a minute. They all believed me; none of them said a bad word like you deserved it or you are bad. Nothing, absolutely nothing. I didn't feel that I had to prove it and I think the reason I didn't is because everybody was on my side . . .

Similar to others, this participant reasoned that the detectives would not exert so much effort if they did not believe the rape happened. Furthermore, this participant was treated compassionately by the detectives, which made her feel believed. Taken together, the

detectives' effort in her case and compassionate treatment put her at ease; she did not have to prove she was raped.

In contrast, some participants with nonprosecuted cases reported that the detectives verbally communicated their opinions of disbelief. That is, detectives told the victims that they did not believe their account of the rape or that they believed the offender more than the victim. In the next example, an 18-year-old White female was raped by an African American male, who was a casual friend, in the parking lot of her workplace while on a break. Afterward, she returned to work to finish her shift and later called a rape crisis counselor who encouraged her to receive a forensic examination. The victim had the exam on the same day and made a police report 2 days after the assault. The offender was never arrested. The participant describes how the detective communicated disbelief of her story:

4114: She told me like, "What he said makes more sense than what you're saying." She was kind of like, "I don't understand how this could happen. Show it to me." I had to position my chair next to me and show her exactly what happened. She said she was just doing her job and being thorough. It made me feel hurt because she pretty much was saying she believes him and not me. She made comments about, "If you're lying, you can back out now, and we won't press charges," and so it really kind of scared me . . .

While cases involving African American offenders are often prosecuted, there are other factors about this case that may have influenced it being dropped. The participant had recently finished a mental illness treatment program, and her illness became a focus of the investigation. For example, the detective interviewed her friends to inquire about her mental health. Also, the victim did not make a police report until 2 days after the rape and continued working at her place of employment (i.e., the crime scene) for financial reasons. Detectives are sometimes suspicious of delayed reporting and may have believed that the impact of the rape should have prevented the victim from returning to work (Kerstetter, 1990), thus harming her credibility.

Similar to this participant, other women with nonprosecuted cases were told they could "back out" if they were lying, and in some cases participants were warned that they could be charged for lying. Not surprisingly, these participants felt like they were being treated like the criminal in the case instead of the victim and felt hurt that the detectives did not believe them.

In addition to these verbalized opinions of disbelief, participant reported other indirect ways that detectives communicated their disbelief. Some women reported that the detectives questioned numerous parts of their story repeatedly, which indicated to the participants that the detectives did not believe them. The participants felt the detectives were "picking their stories apart" to find flaws with their accounts of the rape. Participants with prosecuted cases did not report this level of scrutiny by the detectives. As mentioned earlier, many participants reported experiencing negative responses, such as victim blaming, very early in the interviews with detectives. Therefore, it may be possible that the detectives had constructed images of the women or made a decision about the case prior to the interview, which is highlighted in the following example. In a continuation of the interview discussed earlier (the victim awoke partially naked in her husband's truck), the participant discusses how the detective made a decision about her case prior to examining all available evidence. This was

the participant's first and only interview with the detective, which took place 1 day after the initial report and rape:

4125: Yeah, he [detective] said you don't have a case. You never blacked out. I said, excuse me? I said, I told you this, this, this. Well, you don't have a case. . . . Okay, fine, Detective B, show me the evidence, show me the lab results.

I: So that day, did he have any evidence from the lab?

4125: No. It was going to take a few weeks.

I: So, are they still waiting for results to officially drop the case or have they . . .

4125: They've already dropped my case.

The detective made a decision about the case without all of the available evidence, which would have taken only a few more weeks to receive. The participant received the detective's decision during the first interview. Thus, it is likely the detective made a predetermined decision about the case prior to interviewing the victim.

### *Effect on Victims' Level of Disclosure*

Participants who had positive experiences with the detectives had markedly different levels of engagement during the interviews than victims who had negative experiences. In prosecuted cases, participants described their detectives as building rapport with them and communicating belief of the victims' stories, which made the women feel at ease. As a result, victims expressed feeling more comfortable sharing their stories with the detective, which subsequently led to victims disclosing more information. The next example is a continuation of an interview discussed earlier (the woman raped during a massage). The participant explains why being allowed to go at her own pace when telling her story was so important:

4129: Because it's not about anybody else. It's not about them. It's not about what they want. It's about you. You're the victim. It's your life that's just been demolished. You're the one who's mentally screwed up right now . . . what she needs, what she wants, she better get it, because that's the only way you're going to honestly, if it had been any other way, I probably wouldn't have remembered a lot of things. I would have been frustrated, flustered, pissed off, and then I probably wouldn't have as strong a case as I do.

I: So letting them. Them letting you take your time, you were able to,

4129: Think about it. Remember every detail. Remember every detail. If you're in a rush and they're trying to push you 20 different directions, you're going to forget things; you're going to feel like everybody's pushing you for answers and you can't pull the pictures out of your head. OK, OK, this is what was sitting on the table right here. That was the picture on the wall. You rush somebody, you boggle their brain.



This participant illustrates that tending to her well-being and going at her pace are important in helping her *remember* details. In her case, the detectives tended to her well-being prior to conducting an interview and followed her pace during the questioning. The participant noted that the detectives were gentle when asking her questions, validated the difficulty of being interviewed, and did not rush her when answering the questions. The participant indicated that this gentle manner of questioning helped her feel calm and safe, which helped her mind remain focused enough to recall and disclose details of her rape.

Detectives tending to victims' emotional well-being and allowing victims to take their time during the interview may also have additional advantages, as illustrated in the following example. This case involves an 18-year-old White female who was raped by a Latino coworker at a fast food restaurant. The next day, a police officer entered the drive-thru for food and the woman decided to tell the officer about the rape. The officer recognized the offender's name because he was on a tether for prior convictions. The offender was arrested the day after the report and the case ended in a plea bargain. In this exchange, the participant discusses how the detective's pacing of the interview helped her endure the emotionality of talking about the rape, which in turn helped her continue the interview:

4110: It felt like I was there again, and I didn't want to answer the questions. It felt like I was there, and it [rape] was happening again.

I: Did the detective do anything to try and help you through that?

4110: Yes, she slowed down. Like, she wasn't going fast, but if she noticed that I was not, like handling it too well, she would slow it down and talk to me, and help me through it . . .

As illustrated by the participant, the detective attended to the victim's emotional well-being by slowing the pace of the interview, which helped her through the flashbacks and allowed her continue the interview. As such, responding to victims' emotional distress appears to help victims endure the investigational interview, contribute more information to the investigation, and subsequently build a stronger case for prosecution.

In comparison, participants in nonprosecuted cases noted their detectives asked questions in a rapid, forceful manner and communicated disbelief of their stories, which made the participants feel uncomfortable. Some women indicated that this discomfort made it difficult to tell their story and caused them to share fewer details about their rape. These participants stated that they would have disclosed more information if they felt comfortable with the detectives. This next example is a continuation of an interview discussed earlier (participant who was raped by her ex-boyfriend). In this exchange, the participant explains how the detectives' "grilling" manner of questioning affected her level of disclosure:

I: Ideally, what would you have liked the detectives to be like?

4127: I don't know if I necessarily wanna see compassionate or more, more approachable than that. Just not like having the attitude, well, he's saying this, he's saying that. Oh yeah, he's, so why would you mention that to me? Who cares



what he says? It's my word against his. Not having that attitude where I can't talk to you, period. I can't really, really tell you what happened because the attitude that you're carrying with me is that you really don't give a fuck is what it comes down to, but that would be it, I'm sorry . . .

I: No that's ok. How would it have helped for them to, well basically to give a fuck, I mean, how would that have helped?

4127: I don't know if it necessarily would have helped me, but I think it would have been more, I would have been more able to describe to them what it was if they hadn't been cold or unapproachable, it would have been easier for me to tell them, well, this is what it was; this is what he's done; that's why we broke up. This is why he's still here . . .

I: So if I'm understanding right, you would have been able to give them more information had they approached it differently?

4127: Yes

The detectives relayed information about the offender in a manner that made the victim feel disbelieved. In addition, the participant found the detectives' demeanor to be cold, and if victims experience or anticipate negative responses by detectives, they may engage in self-protective behaviors by withholding details, especially if they anticipate the details will elicit hurtful responses. For those participants who did not feel comfortable with the detectives, they predicted that if the detectives had established rapport, then they would have been able to trust the detectives and subsequently share details of the rape.

Overall, the participants with nonprosecuted cases noted that the detectives created a contentious atmosphere, which prevented them from sharing details of the rape. Thus, these cases may have been dropped by the CJS because they lacked strong statements. The CJS makes charging decisions based on whether a judge or jury will find the victim's account of the rape credible. A key indicator used by the CJS in determining credibility is the absence of gaps in the victim's statement; prosecutors reject cases when the victim's statement contains gaps (Frohmann, 1997).

### Negative Case Analysis

All of the participants with prosecuted cases noted that the detectives used a gentle manner of questioning. However, the experience of participants with nonprosecuted cases varied depending on the relationship to the offender. Specifically, all participants in the nonprosecuted cases experienced a harsher style of questioning by the detectives except those raped by strangers who were *never apprehended*. Participants who were raped by strangers who were never apprehended describe their detectives' manner of questioning as gentle, similar to the participants with prosecuted cases who were raped by *apprehended* strangers. This gentle manner of questioning helped the victims disclose details of their rapes, but the cases were ultimately not prosecuted because the suspects were never caught. Therefore, it is possible that the detectives viewed these victims as credible, which may explain their manner and high level of investigational effort.

## Member Check Results

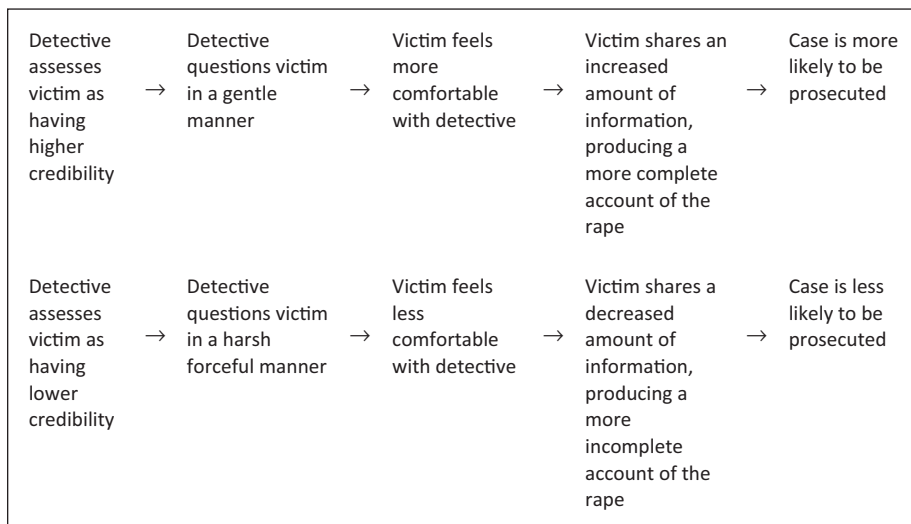
The advocate informants were asked to think about a recent case and describe their client's experiences with the detective. Similar to participants in the current study, the advocate informants reported victims' experiences with the detectives as primarily different for cases that were ultimately prosecuted (i.e., gentle questioning) compared with those that were not with one exception. One advocate described a case that was not prosecuted, but the detective built rapport and never showed disbelief of the victim. Subsequently, the detective told the advocate that he wanted the case to be prosecuted but could not convince the prosecutor to do so. This case is different from the findings of this study in that a victim whose case was *not* prosecuted was questioned in a gentle manner by a detective who wanted the case to be prosecuted.

The second component of the member check was providing an overview of the theory to the advocate informants to obtain their feedback. The advocates noted that the theory was understandable and reflected most of the experiences of their clients. They could not recall any cases that resulted in prosecution when the detectives questioned the victims in a harsh manner. However, the advocates were present for some interviews in which victims were questioned in a gentle manner but the cases were not prosecuted. One advocate further elaborated that she had a "gut feeling" that the cases would be dropped because the detectives had a subtle apathy in their body language (e.g., minimal eye contact) and that there was an absence of rapport development by the detective. While the detectives did not question these victims in a harsh manner, they also were not building rapport either and in the advocate's experience these cases were not ultimately prosecuted. The advocates predicted that their presence may have influenced the detectives to adopt a neutral instead of harsh interview style with these victims. Although none of the victims in the current study had advocates present during their interviews with detectives, it seems important for future research to explore the role that advocacy plays in how detectives question rape victims and subsequent case outcomes.

## Discussion

Rape typically has no witnesses, and thus the successful prosecution of rape cases rests strongly on the information provided by victims during the investigation (Konradi, 2007; Martin, 2005). Cases are more likely to move forward through the CJS when a complete account of the crime has been documented (Martin, 2005). As such, communication between the victim and detective during the investigation is vital to building a strong case and, perhaps ultimately, its prosecutorial outcome. However, the complexity of these interactions has not been examined. There may be variability in how detectives ask questions, which may affect victims positively or negatively, and subsequently influence the information given by the victims.

An overarching goal of this research is to build a theory that explains how the interactions between the victim and detective affect the quality of the investigation itself (see Figure 1). Detectives often review the responding officers' reports prior to interviewing the



**Figure 1.** An emerging theory of detectives' influence on victim disclosure

victim, perhaps to assess the credibility of the victim and the case. This assessment may influence the detectives' interview style. That is, if a detective deems a victim highly credible and/or requiring less investigational effort, then the detective approaches the interview differently because the aim becomes building the case further. Detailed information to build a strong case requires the detective to create a comfortable environment to maximize the level of detail from the victim. A safe environment is created through a combination of different mechanisms.

First, the detective builds rapport with the victim prior to conducting the interview, which increases the victim's feelings of comfort before providing an account of the rape. Second, the detective begins the interview by asking the victim to give a full account of the rape with the detective encouraging the victim to disclose. After the victim describes the entire rape, the detective asks follow-up questions in a gentle manner at a conversational pace. In addition, the detective listens to the victim's story and concerns intently throughout the interview. Finally, the detective does not express doubt of the victim's account or blame the victim for causing the rape but instead verbalizes being on the "victim's side." Through this manner of questioning, the detective creates a calm environment, which helps the victim feel comfortable and regard the detective as trustworthy and safe. Consequently, the detective is able to elicit more information from the victim, producing a more complete account of the rape, and subsequently a stronger case for prosecution. Therefore, the case has a better chance of being prosecuted.

Although the effect of investigational interviews on the quality of rape victim statements is an understudied area, prior studies offer insight into why this comfortable interview environment will yield a stronger statement. The literature suggests that the majority

of information elicited from an interview occurs in the opening narration if the victim remains uninterrupted (Fisher, 1995). Thus, the detectives most likely obtained more information by allowing victims to tell the *entire* account of the rape at their own pace in the beginning of the interview. Previous research has also found that victims experience many overwhelming feelings following a rape, including fear, shame, and humiliation (Bletzer & Koss, 2006). As such, the detective attending to a victim's emotional well-being may help her endure the intense emotionality experienced during the interview, so she can continue providing information.

Prior studies have also found that many victims feel vulnerable after rape and anticipate further harm by law enforcement, such as being blamed or not believed (Herman, 1992; Patterson, Greeson, & Campbell, 2009). Therefore, a detective building rapport and expressing belief in the victim's story could put her at ease and help her feel comfortable enough to disclose sensitive details about the rape. As such, the detective has constructed an interview environment conducive to the rape victim disclosing. Furthermore, building rapport during investigational interviews has been shown to increase the amount of information elicited by interviewees. In an experimental research study, Collins, Lincoln, and Frank (2002) examined the effect of rapport on eyewitnesses who observed and then recalled a videotaped simulated crime. The study found that participants in the rapport group provided more correct information without a corresponding increase in incorrect information. These participants stated that the interviewers' supportive attitude made them try harder to recall additional details.

Conversely, if the detective regards the victim as having low credibility and/or the case as requiring more investigational effort, then the detective creates an interview environment that feels uncomfortable for the victim. An uncomfortable environment is developed through a variety of different methods. First, the detective does not begin the interview by building rapport but instead asks a long succession of questions in a forceful "drilling" manner at a rapid pace. Second, the detective engages in hurtful behaviors, such as blaming the victim for causing the rape. Third, the detective verbalizes doubt about the victim's account, threatens her with criminal charges, or expresses belief in the offender's story. As a result of this questioning style, the detective has created an intimidating interview environment, which leads to the victim feeling uncomfortable. Accordingly, the detective is unable to elicit as much information from the victim, producing an incomplete account of the rape, and subsequently a weaker case for prosecution. Therefore, the case has a lower chance of being prosecuted. This theory fits most victims with nonprosecuted cases, except victims raped by strangers who were never apprehended. In those cases, the victims were questioned in a gentle manner by their detectives during the initial investigation, which helped the victims disclose, but the suspects were never caught.

Prior research on the CJS's response to rape may also shed some light on why this harsh type of interview style may prevent the victim from sharing information. Rape profoundly disrupts the victim's sense of trust and safety, which leaves the victim on high alert for potential threats to her physical or psychological well-being (Herman, 1992). Furthermore, a victim will attempt to avoid reminders of the rape or the offender for a long period of time following the rape. Therefore, a detective who questions a victim in a forceful, blaming

manner is likely to resemble the offender, creating an uncomfortable and intimidating interview environment. When a victim experiences or anticipates negative responses by law enforcement, the victim may engage in self-protective behavior by withholding details of her rape, especially if she anticipates the details will elicit judgmental or hurtful responses.

Prior research has also found that using a harsh or neutral tone decreases the amount of information elicited during an investigational interview. As described earlier, Collins and colleagues (2002) examined the effect of rapport (or lack thereof) on eyewitnesses. The participants who were interviewed with an abrupt (i.e., harsh) or neutral style were reluctant to provide information because of the interviewers' attitudes. This study suggested that an aggressive, controlling interviewer could decrease the amount of information shared by a cooperative witness. Furthermore, an interviewer who exhibits disinterest during the interview could be viewed as having a negative attitude, which subsequently affects information shared by the participant. This suggests that the interviewer's attitude plays an important role in the quality and quantity of information provided by a victim. Similarly, the current study found that some detectives created an intimidating and adversarial interview setting, which impeded the victims from sharing information about the rape and thus created gaps in the victim statements.

Whereas the current study focuses on victim–detective interactions during the investigation, Frohmann (1998) examined victim–prosecutor interactions and found that prosecutors also approached the cases that were ultimately prosecuted differently than the cases that were not prosecuted. Through interviews and field observations, Frohmann was able to determine that the charging decisions were based on factors of credibility, which then influenced their approach with victims. That is, when the prosecutors viewed the victims or cases as credible, they would build relationships of trust, which helped the cases continue. However, when prosecutors believed the victims or cases lacked credibility, the prosecutors expressed concern for the victims' safety but never offered legal protection to keep the victims safe. Furthermore, they warned the victims that a trial could be potentially humiliating. The prosecutors' goal in expressing these concerns was to convince the victims to withdraw their participation, which would prevent the prosecutors from disclosing their decisions to drop the cases. It is possible that prosecutors approach victims with "concern" rather than harshness because the chief prosecuting or district attorney is an elected position. Therefore, prosecutors blaming defense attorneys (e.g., being cross-examined is humiliating) or jurors (e.g., they will not believe you) allows the victim to view the prosecutors in a positive light because they were showing their "concern." Overall, Frohmann's study as well as the current study suggest that law enforcement and prosecutors formulate their decisions very early in the process, which dictates how they interact with victims and subsequently creates stronger or weaker cases.

### *Implication of the Findings*

The results from this study indicate that detectives' manner of questioning can lead to decreased opportunities for justice for some victims, which has implication for accessible

victim advocacy and law enforcement training. First, the advocate informants suggested that victims were treated better when advocates were present. Even when the cases were not prosecuted, the detectives at least had a neutral interview style when the advocates were present, which may be less hurtful than a harsh interviewing style. Similarly, research has found that advocacy decreases law enforcement's negative treatment of rape victims (Campbell, 2006).

None of the cases involving racial/ethnic minority victims was prosecuted, and detectives used a harsh manner of questioning with most of them. This finding is similar to research that showed racial/ethnic minority victims were less likely to have their cases prosecuted (Spohn et al., 2001). Rape crisis center advocacy services may buffer such treatment, but many victims, particularly racial/ethnic minority women, may not know about rape crisis centers and how they can help immediately post assault (Campbell et al., 2001). Rape crisis centers should consider focusing more attention on increasing public awareness of their advocacy services, particularly in communities of color. In addition, rape crisis centers need to collaborate with law enforcement agencies to offer legal advocacy in a more systematic way. Some law enforcement departments or officers may refuse to have advocates present during the interview. All states have laws on rights of crime victims but do not always include the right to have victim advocates present during the investigational process (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2008). Because the findings of the current study suggest that advocacy presence increases humane treatment, state policies should consider adopting the right to victim advocacy during the criminal justice process.

Second, law enforcement officers receive minimal training on investigating rape or how to respond to rape victims (Lonsway, Welch, & Fitzgerald, 2001). Given the complex and sensitive nature of the crime and the unique needs of rape victims, improving training for law enforcement is a priority. Prior research has demonstrated the effectiveness of specialized training programs aimed at teaching law enforcement how to build rapport with victims. Building on this research, the current findings suggest that the training should specifically include instructing law enforcement about the gentle and harsh interview styles and their impact on victims. This is especially important because prior research has shown that law enforcement significantly underestimates the impact their behavior has on victims (Campbell, 2005).

This study can serve as a catalyst for several research projects. First, it appears that detectives may have predetermined notions about rape cases prior to interviewing victims; therefore, further research is needed to examine *when* detectives form their beliefs about cases. An ethnographic field study would address this question because it could capture *when* detectives form their initial beliefs about the case, and if and how those perceptions *change* as the case progresses. Second, the current study suggests that preconceived beliefs may affect the detective's manner of questioning, which may subsequently influence the quality of the victim statement. A larger quantitative observational study is needed to examine (a) more in-depth interactions that occur between victims and detectives and (b) how the victim's and detectives' preinterview notions may affect these interactions. Videotaped interactions of detectives and victims would allow for a thorough examination of the investigational interview process. Observational research would be beneficial to answer these

questions because it measures behavior without relying on participants' memory or self-awareness of their behavior.

### *Limitations of This Study*

A few methodological limitations of this study may mitigate the strength of the conclusions that can be drawn from the work. The data that informed the development of the theory were from the victims' perspective, which is appropriate given the intent of the theory, but do not include data from other stakeholders. Therefore, the data may not provide a complete picture of what happened during the interactions with the detectives. It is possible that detectives would have a different description of the interview, and so the exact nature of the interaction cannot be determined. However, Campbell (2005) found high interrater reliability between the accounts of victims and law enforcement regarding how victims were treated.

The data also did not include demographic information (e.g., age) about the detectives handling the participants' cases. Therefore, this study cannot examine if the detectives' characteristics influenced the interactions between the victims and themselves. For example, it is possible that victims felt more comfortable with younger detectives. In addition, this study did not follow a particular set of detectives to determine if detectives approach all victims consistently (e.g., a detective always questioning victims in a gentle manner) or if their manner of questioning was always influenced by credibility. However, Frohmann (1998) followed a set of prosecutors to examine their interactions with victims and found that prosecutors did not treat victims consistently but instead approached victims according to their decisions of whether to prosecute the cases. Furthermore, in many jurisdictions, detectives are randomly assigned to cases, so if detectives question victims in a consistent manner, it would be likely that at least some victims with prosecuted cases would experience a harsh manner of questioning, whereas some victims with nonprosecuted cases would experience a gentle manner of questioning.

The rape survivors who were included in this study are a select group—those who were willing to participate in research—and may not be representative of all victims who report to the CJS. Those who agree to participate in research may be different from the general population of rape victims. It is possible that victims who self-selected into this study were extremely satisfied or dissatisfied with their experiences with the detectives. Where advocates are present, detectives may be more neutral. This represents a smaller number of cases, but they too may be different from the cases included in this study.

Finally, the qualitative nature of this project limits the conclusions that can be drawn about causality and the extent to which these findings can be generalized to the larger population of rape victims. For example, the current study had a small number of participants and thus cannot definitively conclude that the different characteristics of the prosecuted and nonprosecuted cases led detectives to treat victims in a particular manner. As an exploratory study in an understudied area, the overarching goal of this project was to build a theory to explain how the interactions between rape victims and detectives affect the quality of investigations. While the rape victims in the current sample described how the detectives' manner



of questioning influenced the information shared, we cannot definitively conclude that the interview style strengthened or weakened the victim statements. It is entirely possible that other factors (e.g., posttrauma distress) interacted with the detectives' manner of questioning to influence their level of disclosure to the detectives.

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### Note

1. Throughout this article, the term *victim* is used to reflect the violent nature of this crime and the language used by criminal justice system personnel.

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## Bio

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